

To: Spalding, Curt[Spalding.Curt@epa.gov]; Garvin, Shawn[garvin.shawn@epa.gov]
From: Enck, Judith
Sent: Wed 6/15/2016 1:04:41 PM
Subject: FW: News Clips (PFCs)

WNYC Radio: Hoosick Falls Officials Stayed Silent on Toxic Water

The Takeaway with John Hockenberry

Link: <http://www.wnyc.org/story/irrefutable-evidence-contamination-hoosick-falls/>

Jun 14, 2016

Residents in the small town of Hoosick Falls, New York, got bad news last week. Back in February, many in the community got blood tests to determine if they had been exposed to the chemical PFOA. The results now show that many residents have elevated levels of the chemical in their blood — sometimes up to 50 or 100 times the national average.

PFOA was manufactured at a local factory owned by Saint Gobain and was used in everything from pizza boxes to water proof jackets. Studies have linked it to diseases like cancer.

Alarmingly, Department of Health officials knew Hoosick Falls' water was contaminated months before coming public with that information, despite urging from the EPA to alert residents.

In February, The Takeaway spoke with Michael Hickey, a Hoosick resident who himself tested the drinking water for PFOA after his father died of cancer.

"The EPA came out with a letter. They were saying, 'Don't drink with it, don't cook with it,'" said Hickey. "And yet, the Department of Health was giving out a letter at the same meeting that we were at saying that the chemical was completely fine and it's safe up to 50,000 parts per trillion."

Now, residents like Loreen Hackett, along with her family, are learning that they have elevated levels of PFOA in their blood streams. They're asking why they were not notified earlier, and are demanding that the New York State Assembly look into their case. Click on the 'Listen' button above to hear our full conversation with Loreen.

PHOTO Children in Hoosick Falls who have elevated levels of PFOA in their blood.
(pfoaprojectny / Twitter)

Times Union

Hoosick Falls teacher responds to Mark Ruffalo's NY environmental action video

(updated)

By Matthew Hamilton on June 13, 2016 at 2:48 PM

Days after actor Mark Ruffalo appeared in a video touting New York's environmental leadership, a teacher from Hoosick Falls is responding, asking the actor to stand with the community ravaged by a water contamination crisis.

The video of Ruffalo popped up on Gov. Andrew Cuomo's YouTube page on Thursday. Ruffalo touts environmental strides the state has taken under the Cuomo administration's watch, including plaudits for an increase of the state Environmental Protection Fund to \$300 million and \$200 million for drinking water infrastructure, among other funding scored in the most recent state budget.

The video also includes clips of former Vice President Al Gore from the October rollout of actions taken by the state to combat climate change.

On Monday, Hoosick Falls Central School District music teacher Rob Allen responded on the district's YouTube page, highlighting "poor leadership from elected officials" and the community's own response to the ongoing perfluorooctanoic acid contamination. The video also highlights what some residents in the small Rensselaer County village and the surrounding area have seen as a long wait for state action and criticizes information included in blood test results that show PFOA levels well above the national average in a number of cases.

"Mr. Ruffalo, we appreciate your leadership and advocacy for clean water, and your increased focus on environmental issues. I am sure that the governor may have done some great things for our state lands," Allen says. "But hearing from you about our governor's supposed great leadership and protecting the environment and our people was very hard for us in Hoosick Falls and not to mention other community in our state and elsewhere that are going through the same PFOA contamination."

Allen also asks Ruffalo for his assistance in advocating for annual blood testing and biomonitoring to track PFOA contamination, a trust fund for future medial expenses, state and federal hearings on the crisis, and increased water testing for PFOA and other chemicals statewide.

In a joint statement, the state departments of Environmental Conservation and Health defended the state's action on the contamination crisis.

"The residents of Hoosick Falls are understandably concerned about the pollution of their water and soil caused by Honeywell and Saint Gobain," the departments said. "The state has worked aggressively to make sure these companies are accelerating the clean-up process and has actively managed the installation of a new filtration system that is removing PFOA from the public water supply, as well as hundreds of individual filtration systems for homeowners with private wells. The state will continue to use its legal authority to hold both companies fully responsible for their actions and ensure that they comprehensively address the impacts from the contamination on the community."

Update: Ruffalo responded to Allen's video in a statement Monday evening:

The water contamination in Hoosick Falls is a tragedy. I certainly support the community and add my voice to those of local residents in calling for immediate and meaningful action. It's crucial that moving forward, contamination in Hoosick Falls and other similar cases across the country be addressed and affected residents given the help they need. All over the United States, there is a woeful lack of oversight of our water systems. I stand with the victims of Hoosick Falls and ask all our leaders to do whatever it may take to restore faith in the water systems that people's lives are so dependent upon. No one in this modern nation should have to fear that the water they are drinking is contaminated, but once that trust has been breached every effort should be taken to restore it including ongoing monitoring.

NCPR

Hoosick Falls reps, constituents differ on approach to toxic water probe

by Karen DeWitt (NYS Capitol Correspondent) , in Albany NY

Jun 14, 2016 — As part of the push to end the legislative session by Thursday, state lawmakers who represent Hoosick Falls, where water has been contaminated with PFOA, want to extend the statute of limitations to bring lawsuits against polluters.

The bill would extend the current statute of limitations law to allow a three-year window between when a contaminated area is declared a Superfund site and when New Yorkers can file a lawsuit.

The Senate sponsor, Senator Kathy Marchione, who represents Hoosick Falls, said it is a top priority for her in the remaining days of the session. "There can't be a time limit on justice for Hoosick Falls families," Marchione said.

Hoosick Falls resident Michelle Baker said, at the very least, she wants the right to hold potential polluters accountable. "Our water has been contaminated for possibly decades," Baker said. PFOA, which stands for perfluorooctanoic acid, is a chemical that has been linked to cancer. She said countless residents and mothers like herself go to bed or wake up with a "tear in their eye." "We are wondering, 'Is my child going to be sick next, am I going to be sick next?'" said Baker.

In the Assembly, 132 of 150 members back the bill, but Marchione said even though the bill was written in February, she has not spoken to Senate Leader John Flanagan about the measure yet. But she said she is encouraged that the measure advanced through the Senate Judiciary Committee and plans to talk to the Senate leader in the three days left in the legislative session.

Marchione said she instead has been discussing whether the Senate should hold hearings on how the Cuomo administration handled the Hoosick Falls water crisis. There have been allegations that officials in Cuomo's health department knew of the PFOA contamination a year and a half before they warned residents.

The Cuomo administration acted early in 2016, after the federal EPA's regional administrator told villagers in late 2015 not to drink their water. But Marchione said although she has not ruled out hearings, she'd rather work cooperatively right now. "When you start pointing fingers and

you start laying blame, it's harder to work with people," said Marchione. "I don't want anyone stopping the progress that has been made in Hoosick."

Marchione said it is a better idea to create a task force to decide how to handle future cases of potential chemical contamination in drinking water. Marchione admitted, however, that all of the meetings in a task force might not be public.

Baker said she would rather have public hearings. "I do support the hearings, because then that way, residents can be present," said Baker. "We might have the opportunity to ask questions. We can hear every answer that's given." Baker said she thinks hearings could proceed without finger-pointing. But Baker said she's grateful to Marchione for trying to push the bill to expand the time to bring lawsuits against polluters.

Marchione conceded she has similar questions about who knew what when on the PFOA contamination. "And if that's real, we need to know why that occurred," Marchione said. But, she maintained hearings would not be the right way to go at this time, and praised Cuomo and his administration for acting quickly since the winter to offer residents water filters and blood tests.

The Assembly sponsor of the statute of limitations extension, John McDonald, said he'd like to hold hearings. "It's something that I think has merit to it," said McDonald. He said he asked the Assembly speaker for permission to do so. But Speaker Carl Heastie said although he has not ruled out holding hearings on the state's handling of the Hoosick Falls water crisis, he doesn't plan on holding them anytime soon.

Senator Kathy Marchione promotes bill to extend the statute of limitations to sue for toxic contamination with (right to left) Hoosick Falls resident Michele Baker, Assembly sponsor John McDonald, and Environmental Advocates' Liz Moran. Photo: Karen DeWitt

Lawmakers want folks in Hoosick Falls to get money for health problems

By Ali Stewart Published: June 13, 2016, 2:15 pm Updated: June 13, 2016, 4:27 pm

HOOSICK FALLS, N.Y. (NEWS10) – Local lawmakers are pushing for a measure that would allow people in Hoosick Falls and other Superfund communities to recover the cost of their medical bills.

Assemblyman John McDonald and Senator Kathy Marchione are backing the legislation.

Right now a statute of limitations prevents most from filing a personal injury lawsuit, but the cause of their decades-long health problems has only recently become known.

The bill passed in the assembly, 132 to 7, but has yet to go up for a vote in the senate.

"I believe there shouldn't be a time limit on justice for Hoosick Falls' families. John's a democrat and I'm a republican, but we've worked together to create a common sense solution reflecting our belief that there can't be a time limit on justice," Senator Marchione said.

If passed, people harmed by contaminants at a superfund site could bring personal injury claims

for up to three years after the site is designated.

Rally to push for hearing on state's response to PFOA crisis

WNYT Staff

Updated: 06/15/2016 6:57 AM

The legislative session is slated to end on Thursday, but that isn't stopping families who had been drinking contaminated water from calling on legislators to hold hearings into the state's response to the crisis.

Documents show that the state health department had known about the PFOA contamination in Hoosick Falls since August 2014. It took more than a year -- until December 2015 -- for residents to be told to stop drinking the water.

PFOA is a chemical that has been linked to cancer and other illnesses.

Tests showing how much PFOA residents of Hoosick Falls have in their blood recently came back. The average American has two parts per billion of PFOA in their blood. The average Hoosick Falls resident has 11 times that number.

One person came back at more than 400 times the national average, according to Weitz and Luxenberg, the firm handling lawsuits for hundreds of residents.

Some lawmakers have been calling for hearings on the state response to PFOA for months. One of the most vocal proponents, Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin, will be at a rally with residents on Wednesday.

Other lawmakers have said hearings aren't needed or are pushing other bills they say will help Hoosick Falls residents.

Assemblyman John McDonald and Sen. Kathy Marchione are pushing a bill for residents to get their past medical bills paid for if an illness can be linked to PFOA. They say the statute of limitations shouldn't apply.

Residents plan to hold their rally at 11 a.m. Wednesday.

Letters: Residents deserve action on PFOA

By Letters to the editor on June 15, 2016 at 3:32 AM

I live in Hoosick Falls, a community that has become the face of perfluorooctanoic acid contamination in New York. PFOA, a suspected cancer agent, was just recently labeled a hazardous substance and has been polluting our water supply for years. It's bad enough to learn

that you've been drinking chemical-laced water, but it's worse to learn of the behind-the-scenes inaction that led to this tragedy.

According to media reports, the state Department of Health consistently shushed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency scientists as they sounded the alarm about PFOA pollution, and now Gov. Andrew Cuomo is staunchly defending his administration's lackadaisical response to the crisis. Thousands of Rensselaer County residents have discovered they have elevated levels of PFOA in their blood because of poisoned drinking water, and few elected officials are taking any action to address the issue.

We need an all-hands-on-deck approach, including public hearings to answer basic questions, like why unregulated chemicals are allowed on the market without fully knowing the health consequences, who knew what when, and what measures government should take to prevent future water contamination.

People in my community are sick from the pollution in the water. A bill sponsored by Assemblyman John McDonald, D-Cohoes, has overwhelmingly passed the Assembly that will help those already impacted file for personal injury damages. Now that's good government. However, it's frustrating that the same bill, sponsored by Sen. Kathy Marchione, R-Halfmoon, remains stalled in the Senate.

We, the residents of Hoosick Falls, deserve answers and accountability, not lingering questions and stall tactics.

Michele Baker

Hoosick Falls

High concentration of PFOA found at North Pownal site

Posted: Jun 14, 2016 12:51 PM EST Updated: Jun 14, 2016 12:53 PM EST

POWNAL, Vt. (AP) - Vermont officials have announced that the state found a new concentration of a potentially cancer-causing chemical in the village of North Pownal.

Vermont Public Radio reports Trish Coppolino of the Department of Environmental Conservation said Monday that PFOA monitoring near the former Pownal Tannery found levels of the chemical above 200 parts per trillion.

The safe drinking water advisory level for PFOA in Vermont is 20 parts per trillion. PFOA is a suspect carcinogen that could lead to birth defects and thyroid damage.

Coppolino says state conservation officials were just checking the Pownal Tannery as a precaution and they weren't expecting to see PFOA levels that high. She says the concentration seems like an anomaly, but homes in the area will be checked.

Copyright 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Hoosick Falls PFOA hero 'surprised' at Australian government response

The Herald (Australia)

By MICHAEL McGOWAN

June 2, 2016, 8:30 p.m.

THE man widely acknowledged for helping to uncover the contamination of drinking water in a New York town with the same potentially cancer-causing chemicals that have spread onto properties in Williamstown says he's surprised at the slow reaction to the issue by government agencies in Australia.

Michael Hickey, a 37-year-old insurance underwriter from Hoosick Falls in upstate New York, discovered that drinking water in the small town was polluted with perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA, in 2014.

He began investigating whether there "might be something in the water" after his father died of kidney cancer in 2013. "A lot of people just seemed to be pretty sick," he said. "Random cancers, a lot of illness for a small town."

His search led him to the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics plant on the edge of the town, where PFOA, or C8 as it is sometimes known, was once used to manufacture Teflon, and where Mr Hickey's father worked for more than 30 years.

"It was pretty simple, I typed in Teflon and cancer and it pulled up the C8 science panel from Dupont, and the first illness listed is kidney cancer," he said.

After meeting resistance from his local council, Mr Hickey paid for his own testing of town water and discovered elevated levels of PFOA. The state of New York has since declared the town an environmental clean-up site, and the state's health department is conducting a cancer study on residents.

Though not by his own admission a natural activist, Mr Hickey has become an advocate for communities exposed to PFC contamination. "It was obviously personal for me," Mr Hickey said.

"My dad was only retired for 15 months before he passed away [and] I kind of felt like he got cheated."

Mr Hickey has watched the contamination issue unfold in Australia, and says he's "surprised" at the federal government's unwillingness to take strong action, particularly on blood testing.

"Once you blood test you know how bad it is over there and you can possibly know how long you've been drinking it ... you know how exposed you've been," he said.

"You can also medically monitor."

Hoosick Fall, NY residents demand hearings, take to social media

By Edward Damon

berkshireeagle.com

POSTED: 06/14/2016 09:37:31 PM EDT

HOOSICK FALLS, NY — Village residents affected by contamination from PFOA want answers from state officials.

They're demanding legislators hold hearings over the state's response to contamination, and calling for the passage of a new bill that would extend how long people have to file personal injury lawsuits.

And a new social media campaign launched by residents aims to put faces to the PFOA blood test results, while calling out elected officials they say aren't doing enough.

Community members rattled by the contamination issue, joined by Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin (R-Troy), will hold a press conference in Albany on Wednesday morning. Students, parents, teachers, environmental and health advocates will deliver their PFOA blood test results to the state senate in person, according to McLaughlin's office.

State Sen. Kathy Marchione (R-Halfmoon) said this week the hearings could devolve into "finger-pointing," according to news reports, and that she would favor a task force to look at the state's response.

State officials have been criticized for not issuing immediate warnings about water contaminated with PFOA, or perfluorooctanoic acid, a chemical formerly used to make Teflon that has been linked to cancer and other diseases. A village resident first alerted officials about its presence in the summer of 2014. It wasn't until EPA Regional Director Judith Enck wrote to the village on Nov. 25, 2015 that residents were told to not drink or cook with the tap water; the village didn't immediately update its website or issue a notice to residents.

Since then, filtration systems have been installed on the municipal water supply and private wells. PFOA has turned up in nearby Petersburg, N.Y., and in Vermont around Bennington, North Bennington and Pownal. New York state environmental officials say Saint-Gobain and Honeywell International are the parties responsible for contamination caused by their predecessors that operated in the village for decades.

The idea of hearings were first raised in February, but never came to fruition.

"If they're going to ignore us, then I'm going to make sure they see us," resident Loreen Hackett said in a phone interview Tuesday.

Hackett is one of 2,000 residents who took part in a biomonitoring study that tested for PFOA

levels in their blood. She and Michelle O'Leary are co-founders a social media effort called The PFOA Project, which uses Facebook and Twitter.

Results of blood tests found the average level of PFOA in residents' blood was roughly 23.5 parts per billion (ppb), or some 11 times the national average.

Hackett said she's lived in the village for most of her life. Her level of 266 ppb is similar to those who worked at factories that processed PFOA, although she never set foot inside a factory. She said she's angered by a slow response from the state and that she was lied to for 18 months.

Hackett said her and O'Leary issued a call for photos of people on Facebook. Residents voluntarily submitted photos of themselves holding signs which say the result of their own PFOA level. Those pictures were posted to Twitter. Among them are Hackett's grandchildren, who are Age 4 and 6.

In under a week, the Facebook group and Twitter have about 300 members and followers. The Twitter handle is @PFOAProjectNY1. Hackett, who said she had a one-day, crash-course in how to use Twitter, said she's amazed at how fast it took off.

Still, she said she and other residents deserve answers.

Elected officials have argued the most important thing is to stop residents from drinking bottled water and spoken about the community's need to "move forward."

But that's not good enough for people like Hackett.

"Given what we learned about what was concealed from us, how can we not look back," she asked. "You can't move forward without looking back. You don't want to make the same mistakes."

###